

Trends in drug use

Since 2004 through our magazine *Druglink*¹, we have been conducting a street drug price and trend survey. The findings of these surveys line up alongside official sources such as the British Crime Survey and Home Office data on drug enforcement activity, and policy reviews such as that published by the Royal Society of Arts, in coming to the following headline conclusions:

- the population of chronic heroin and crack users appears to be ageing with fewer younger people entering this problem drug using population than previously;
- instead, among vulnerable young people, the drug use profile is increasingly 'polydrug' in complexion involving alcohol, cannabis, ecstasy and cocaine²;
- the general prevalence of drug use appears relatively stable after the increases of the 1980s and 1990s;
- but the availability of cocaine powder has increased, signaled by a decline in both price and purity. Generally the price of illicit drugs has fallen markedly during the life of the current drug strategy;
- there has been a substantial increase in the prevalence of 'home grown' cannabis produced in commercial quantities;
- fears about an 'epidemic' of crystal methamphetamine in the UK have proved as yet unfounded;
- young people's use of alcohol has increased, although overall may now have stabilised.

The recently published Office for National Statistics document "Statistics on Drug Misuse, England 2007" identifies that lifetime use of a class A drug dropped slightly from 12.1% in 1998 to 10.5% in 2006. The same publication however indicates that people saying that they

¹ Our 2007 survey compiled feedback from 80 drug services, drug action teams and police forces in 20 towns and cities across the UK and represents a snapshot of current UK street drug trends.

² Parker, H., Painting by numbers. *Druglink*: 22 (4) September/October 2007, pp24-5

had used any Class A drug in the last year had increased, from 2.7% in 1998 to 3.4% in 2006.